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# Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

Harry Bowlby

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ADDRESS by HARRY L. BOWLBY

CITY HALL AUDITORIUM, EAST ORANGE, N. J.

February 12, 1937

Auspices of Citizen's Committee  
Mr. David L. Pierson, Chairman

The Man Every One Should Know - LINCOLN.

At twenty-two minutes past seven o'clock on the morning of April 15, 1865, one of the World's immortals passed from the earth and its toiling into the realms of an endless day. The death toll of a precious life at the Ford Theatre in Washington was now fully collected, the assassin's hand had won the victory. Abraham Lincoln was dead. A Nation was in tears. Standing at the bedside where the great and martyred President had yielded up his spirit to the God Who gave it were members of his immediate family and of his cabinet, and the President's pastor, Rev. Phineas D. Gurley, of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. Secretary Stanton is quoted as quietly saying, in the hush of that historic moment, "In life he belonged to us; now he belongs to the ages." Rev. Mr. Gurley knelt by the bedside and offered a fervent prayer. "Never was a supplication wafted to Heaven under more solemn circumstances," said Col. Oldroyd in his book on the assassination of Lincoln.

Fundamentally we are not here today to mourn a departed immortal. We are here to offer tribute of praise to a living Lincoln whose works and influence still live on. We are here to appraise afresh the service of a man whom every one, every American should know. As the past is prologue of the future and as every wise generation will study the past, so this afternoon we take a few leaves out of the Book of Remembrance, reminding ourselves afresh of some of the virtues and victories of ~~the~~ so noble a Christian, so great a citizen, patriot and leader.

What we do know about this man Lincoln who rose from poverty to power,

from cabin confines to Chief Executive and Counselor of the Nation? Surely we know that he rose from frontiersman to fame imperishable, from western seclusion to wisdom of the sages, from illiteracy to immortality in language he made so articulate, from lawyer to light bearer respecting the Constitution and the Union, from gruelling experiences in life to glorious Emancipator of three million souls, from sturdy but submerged stock to heights which share with Washington, the tribute of "greatest American."

So many books have been written about Abraham Lincoln, so many things said about him, - not all of them true, I shall simply try to emphasize here this afternoon a few facts about this illustrious leader whose name is deeply carved in the World's great hall of fame.

School boys and girls are acquainted with the boyhood and youth of the cabin born lad, his eagerness for knowledge, the nightly study by the dim fire-place, the clerkship in a store, the rail splitter, captain of Volunteers in the Black Hawk War, lawyer and member of the Illinois legislature; and once member of Congress, the Douglas-Lincoln debates, the Presidency, the Civil War, his martyrdom.

First, let us look at Lincoln and his religion. That he was deeply religious there can be no doubt. He learned his theology at his mother's knee, and from the Bible, one of the few books of his boyhood and youthful years. Of his mother who died in his tenth year he said, "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my sainted mother." In his address to friends and other citizens of Springfield, Ill., as he was about to leave for Washington to take the oath as President of the United States, he requested their prayers and assured them of his complete reliance upon God's help.

On February 11, 1861, just before leaving Washington for his inauguration as President of the United States, Lincoln said in that farewell address:

"I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested on the shoulders of Washington.

"Without the aid of that Divine Being, whoever aided him, who



controls mine and all destinies, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail.  
"To his care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you, friends and neighbors, an affectionate farewell."

In Washington, he was a devout worshipper in the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. At his request in order to avoid attention of himself, a side alley door of the Church was left unlocked for him to enter at the mid-week prayer service. While others sat in the well lit room facing Dr. Gurley, the minister, Lincoln sat by himself in a darkened room but where he could hear and thus unobserved by others, quietly share the service.

In 1864, the negroes of Baltimore presented him with a beautiful Bible, as an expression of their gratitude to him. Accepting the Book he said, "This Book is the best gift God has given to man, all the good from the Saviour of the world is communicated through this Book."

As Rev. Edgar DeWitt Jones, D.D., Detroit, recently elected President of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, in a recent article on Lincoln's Debt to the Bible, says: "No man in American public life quoted more scripture in his public speeches, or showed a greater familiarity with the Bible texts, than did Abraham Lincoln." And as Dr. Jones observes in closing that article, "Lincoln was a man of the Bible; and we would to God that in the world today there were more statesmen of his type."

Second, as to morality. Isaac W. Arnold says,- "While his days were spent in hard manual labor, and his evenings in study, he grew up strong in body, healthful in mind, with no bad habits, no stain of intemperance, profanity or vice of any kind. He used neither tobacco nor intoxicating drinks, and, thus living, he grew to be six feet, four inches high, and a giant in strength. In all athletic sports he had no equal."

95 years ago on February 22, Lincoln addressed The Springfield Washingtonian Temperance Society. Near the close of his message he said predicting the down-fall of the destroyer alcohol- "and when the victory shall be complete- when there shall be neither

a slave nor a drunkard on the earth - how proud the title of that land, which may truly claim to be the birthplace and cradle of both those revolutions that shall have ended in that victory. How nobly distinguished that people, who shall have planted, and nurtured to maturity, both the political and moral freedom of their species."

Third, - The Lawyer. His record shines bright in galaxy of legal lights. He ever stood for principle. He would not soil his profession or stain his character by any use of his power of reason and logic to help a criminal defeat the ends of the law and justice. Time and again the records show that he would not take cases of complainants or defendants where he was certain or reasonably sure the client was guilty or in the wrong.

Fourth, The President.

1. Union and Slavery. He stood steadfast as Gibraltar for the preservation of the Union. He proclaimed to the states that would secede from the Union, "We will not go out and you shall not go out." He would save the Union at almost any cost.

And when the God of Wars at Sumter opened the cage which held the ill-omened bird of War to let it flap its wings against the rising sun of the great republic of the Western World, fortunate was the Nation to have as Commander-in-Chief of its Army and Navy, this sterling, steadfast son, Abraham Lincoln, to unlimber the guns of National Honor and Moral Righteousness and defend the Nation against the onimous sign of the scourge of rebellion and the spectre of an inglorious dissolution. He plead with Congress in his second annual message on December 1, 1862, to help him save the Union and also to set the slaves free. These words from that message rise to confirm his wisdom: "We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We- even we here - hold the power and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free - honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly use the last, best hope of earth."

2. His Royal Sympathy. In his letter to Mrs. Bixby of Boston, Nov. 21, 1864, he wrote that he had learned "that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously of the field of battle." He admitted his inability to beguile her from so great a grief

or in the thanks of the republic they died to save. He concluded the letter with these classic and consoling words: "I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavements, and leave only the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

The immortal Gettysburg address, a classic consecrated and forever enshrined in American history still speaks its undying message.

Fifth - The Constitution. In these days when the Constitution and certain parts of it are being challenged in high places, when the quest for unlimited power is plainly astride the steed of so-called popular clamor, the words of Lincoln call to us again - "If you withhold that necessary legislation for the support of the Constitution and Constitutional rights, do you not commit perjury? I ask every sensible man if this is not so?"

In the early eighties, Peter Cooper said,-"I believe that under the Providence of God, he was, next to Washington, the greatest instrument for the preservation of the Union and the integrity of the Country. And this was brought out chiefly through his strict and faithful adherence to the Constitution of his country."

Our own late Thomas A. Edison said,-"The life and character of Abraham Lincoln and his great services to this country during the war of the rebellion will stand as a monument long after the granite monument erected to his memory has crumbled in the dust."

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote:

The weary form, that rested not,  
Save in a martyr's grave,  
The care won face that none forget,  
Turned to the kneeling slave,

We rest in peace, where his sad eyes  
Saw peril, strife and pain;  
His was the awful sacrifice  
And ours, the priceless gain.

Soon shall we leave this building and go to Oraton Parkway to lay a wreath on his monument in commemoration of the 126th anniversary of his birth. That monument in its celestial silence is yet gloriously vocal of the deeds and daring, the matchless victories of the imperturable, indomitable, the imperishable Abraham Lincoln. I leave the memory



of this day with you and I would say in closing the self same words he said of Washington, substituting the single word LINCOLN;- "To add brightness to the sun, or glory to the name of Lincoln is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name, and in its naked, deathless splendor leave it shining on."

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